



parting  
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gifts

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# One Foot on the Isle of Immortals

after Yi Huan (1840-1891)

Vera Schwarcz

Lofty pavilions that reached the clouds  
topple into uncertain dust.

Towering graves dotted a winding cliff,  
spill their secrets in circling water.

Worn walls, cracked columns,  
only the trace of a timid leveret.

Cut a path through the brambles,  
unroll a curtain of thorns.

Imagine the minister one foot on the isle of immortals,  
sacred heaven of fleabane and bamboo.

When silk ropes fettered his body,  
condemned to death three times.

Phoenix wings in aborted flight  
never left this orphaned island.

Every sail leans on the wind that breaks it.  
The guest of ruins on his shattered soul.

## Night Thoughts in the Howling Wind

after Yi Huan (1840–1891)

Vera Schwarcz

Wild dogs howl. A pallid dusk empties the sky.  
On a black mount I meander to call on wooded waters  
Only to arrive at the thicket of my own distress,  
To lodge once more in the capsized chambers of fate.

The moon out of the fishpond makes ice its mirror.  
From sunken roofs wind ignites the snow to smoke.  
In the hound of night I dread the sound of frigid gusts,  
Yet bend into a rootless world, my years thick for maggots.

## Interior

with Young Man Standing on a Window Ledge

Alan Catlin

Here, at the convergence of walls,  
two windows, the closed one, double  
hung casements, bottom panel opaque,  
upper filled by pale blue sky, a fringe  
of cumulus, the open one, on our right,  
is where the young man has crawled out  
onto the building ledge where he stands,  
looking up at something unseen without  
clear intent, neither anxious nor  
unnatural, strangely relaxed  
his empty briefcase hanging loosely  
from the wrist of his visible right hand,  
desk in the interior foreground, clear  
polished not even a blotter, just a computer  
monitor, screen saver by Magritte: a brown  
suited man wearing a black derby hat,  
staring at a falsely blue sky within,  
a telephone desk ensemble unplugged  
suggesting: no incoming calls today.

## On the Shortest Day of the Year Lyn Lifshin

a woman goes into darkness,  
past the black ruby roses  
and is never heard from again.  
She moved quietly past the  
bleached grass a December  
day it got into the sixties. It  
was a day, foggy and warm,  
very much like today. It was  
today. Now you probably  
think it could be me, it seems  
there are reasons. But listen.  
I've never seen, only imagine  
those tissue thin roses and  
that last minute before light  
collapses. A garnet leaf  
on the pond is less red than  
my hair blazing, a lighthouse  
beacon past the trail of  
petals to bring you closer  
than you imagine you are

## My Clerk Job

Michael Nowicki

When I was a clerk  
the computer/cash register decided  
to get me fired. It took care  
of all the customers' records and files  
but decided when I was there  
all alone  
with a backup of twenty customers  
all demanding their audio books  
to spit out double size forms no one  
wanted  
and everyone wanted me to reprint  
which I couldn't for the computer  
would not let me ever  
even if I threatened to hit the thing  
like a snitch gone bad on the street  
so I had to shut the computer down  
and do everything by hand  
the people didn't mind  
as long as they got their records  
and neither did the computer  
which probably wanted  
a vacation as much as I did.

## The Idea of Order at Savannah

Paul D. McGlynn

We fell in love; we, the baguettes, wine.  
How many August evenings in the park,  
Old oaks, the Spanish moss. Strolling,  
Grand old house with gables: let's buy it.  
The summer of that madman,  
Killed six people, like writing an opera.

Lighting your Marlboros, little ritual,  
Stubbing them out. Your fingers so precise.  
Idea of order. We were out on the islands,  
Hérons, gulls. Watched a trawler  
Sink past the horizon. Smudge of smoke.  
We smiled; the world's round, sure enough.

Doves on power lines, like musical notes.  
Chords from Debussy, you said.  
They caught the killer, neat young man,  
Slacks and tennis sweater. We raised glasses,  
Cheered. That sunset. Great curved system  
Of departure and return. September.

## Clean up, Aisle Three

### D. Creason Bartlett

Some old lady fell in the store today. She did this sort of finger-in-a-light-socket jitter, like parts of her wanted to turn down the can aisle and other parts wanted to press on toward the meat market. And for a second she wavered as if gravity itself weren't sure which way to go. A swipe and a miss at her shopping cart, then her legs folded under and she spilled into a pile of house gown and blue-gray hair.

A floor tile popped out of place. I'd been expecting that. I don't know which is in worse shape, this pitiful old mom-and-pop or its old customers who shuffle along in their house slippers, wheezing behind wobbly-wheeled shopping carts.

I tried to remember if I'd mopped up all the water puddles from where the roof leaks and drips—or in some cases pours. This hanger-on of a store fills up like a reservoir every time it rains.

Meanwhile, the old lady's driverless shopping cart swerved and crashed drunk into a Pearl beer display. Several six-packs swan-dove to the floor, and a can split open and spewed beer where I was now pretty sure I'd already mopped. At least I was hoping so. The last thing I needed was to be out of a job—pathetic minimum-wage slop-job though it was—with a lawsuit for negligence.

Misty, the cashier on duty, peeked around the cigarette display beside her register. She scanned the old lady, the runaway shopping cart, and the lake of Pearl as if they were just another line of items she had to punch up prices for. Then her head disappeared behind the cigarettes, and with the same monotone as when calling for a price check, Misty's voice called over the PA system, "Clean up, aisle three."

By then the old lady was picking herself up, working her joints, testing her legs, clutching the cart. When she saw me standing aside, she forced a semi-smile between shivering lips. I saw the flush in the folds of her face and the shame in her stuttering stance. She was embarrassed that I saw her fall. And as I turned toward the stock room to get a mop, the thought registered that it should have been the other way around.

We stand by and watch, all just hangers-on ourselves, waiting for gravity to make up its mind, for someone to come along and mop up after us. I glanced back at the broken tile, the spilled beer, and the old woman wobbling away behind her cart. She did not look back at the mess she'd made, and I did not look forward to cleaning it.

## Wanda at WCCCD

Michael Nowicki

I remember the last few days  
of my first real job as an English tutor  
the kind of job you don't look back from  
the kind of job that says oops you're in the real world  
where paychecks, despite their size, mean something.  
I was making eight hundred a month  
helping others learn subjects  
they would much rather forget  
and soon would when they got into college  
when my boss pays me twenty-five dollars a month  
and pulls me into her office to talk about it  
all the while she knows she will end up saying  
"You can always quit"  
and I wanted to; what the heck; it was just a job  
but this secretary I liked told me to go to the dean  
and fight for my rights so I did with her prompting  
and what was just a job listing at WSU  
turned into nine years at various campuses  
where the coordinators actually liked me  
but eight hundred is about all you can make in English  
when you have little talent and a lot of belief  
so now I am studying to be a librarian  
but that secretary, Wanda, still has faith  
and hope in me.

## Your Presence

Joyce Odam

You are the one in room after shining room—everywhere,  
objects you touch. I want you to know how delicate the  
things of this place, blessed with the dust of waiting, quiet  
as stones in their patience. The hours wait for your sanc-  
tion. The air turns the colors of your movement. The way  
you turn to listen to the walls as a reminder of your secrets.

from Street of the  
Fragile Balance  
Errol Miller

Poor  
souls plunging  
off of the edge of Earth they  
are the mourners the damsels in distress

diminutive old men delicate women

wiping perspiration away

They  
own mighty little of the world's  
goods they are trusting in horseflesh  
& cotton the sum-total/pious people  
whose fidelity has already been tested

beyond the limit of the dream beyond Jefferson's  
city limits in the Blossoms of Springtime...

martial law they need  
martial law: the rule  
of the rose that withers/bullets  
Union armadas/proclamations  
read from the Courthouse steps

Schemes of life/Mississippi carpenters  
barns burning/white trash

marvelous melodies.

# Mother in Exile

## Joyce Odam

My good girl of glasses and tea, whose long eyes see into the dark, whose hands are so cool and foreign, who has lived such a long time—being pretty and old—who wears pale dresses that she has faded with flowers and sewn with work to her body....

She plays such quiet solitaire before the windows, which change the time and scenery for her, so there is always something to see. Her breath is so gentle when she sighs. Something blue lives inside her. When it's cold she wears a sweater....

I don't know what she is waiting for—it never happens—or it always happens and she never mentions it. She doesn't know I am watching. She hums and her lifetime passes. She hums and my tense throat is throbbing....

I am cold. She does not notice. I am no spell breaker....

# Ten Miles of Coyotes

## Walt McDonald

Uncle Oscar was boss, and all of us his boys,  
mostly old men of forty broken down like nags,  
and cousins from town like Billy Joe and me.

How simple life seemed between wars,  
riding horses all summer in high school,  
ten miles of coyotes and rattlers.

Lucinda poured mint juleps for the boys,  
she called us, no hunting parties like her dad's.  
She flirted with us the most, no risk

in vanilla wrists being twisted behind her back  
by wranglers, with Uncle Oscar there. We swore  
she used us both like dolls, rag dolls she hugged

and waltzed to her hums around the wide,  
long porch, taught us to follow her arms  
like dancing bears. Prettiest cousins marry,

and after we flew off to war, Lucinda did.  
We see each other once a year since Vietnam,  
Uncle Oscar dead, the bunkhouse closed,

all of us busy in cities, a frenzy of details  
and children, no hunting parties in years,  
no guns, no good times on the porch.

# Sandstorms on Hardscrabble

Walt McDonald

Wind gusts swirl down our alleys,  
West Texas built of sand. Down under decades,  
what's buried? Not thirty feet of dirt,  
then Jericho, but New Mexico. We breathe adobe dust,  
if not the Anasazis, dust to dust blown

hundreds of miles to us, prairie inheritors.  
Tires and random showers pack sandstorms down.  
The wolves are gone, the buffalo. Most ranches  
drought wiped out are flattened by the wind,  
no signs of life except the town's museum.

Who thought of staying on prairies, mules too stubborn  
to move on? Crack whips and watch them stop.  
Not many lasted. Mule skimmers almost starved,  
moved back to Arkansas. Quakers in wagons  
wobbled down from Ohio to claim the plains

like parchment, following a small still voice  
like jottings in the dust. Only the boldest  
stayed ten winters, abandoned their half-dugouts  
and rolled to Galveston after the others.  
Wind shovels deserts there, grave stones they left

almost forgotten, dug up and planted back by the town,  
as if it mattered. The holy dust is with us  
everywhere, down in the town's flower beds,  
in alleys, the dust we cough in parking lots,  
even in our cars at stop lights, driving home.

# My Father Is a Closer

(for Lorenzo)

R. Yurman

he wants to teach me his secrets  
a firm dry handshake  
and "Speak up, boy, don't mumble"

keep your shoes shined  
always carry an extra hankie  
he can't understand

why I wear scuffed loafers  
slouch and mutter  
how will I work my way

out of the slum he was born in.  
the neighbors really love him  
phone him first

over a busted pipe or a money shortage  
call him "the mayor"  
sure I'm embarrassed

people yelling across the street  
"How's your boy, Julie"  
like I'm not standing right there.

while I wait for him to finish  
what he doesn't say pulses through me  
*too short too slow too fat*

*his hands are clammy  
he never looks me in the eye  
and he mumbles he mumbles.*

he deals out advice  
like pinochle or poker  
and doesn't let me in

on his biggest secret  
if you want to close the deal  
let the buyer do the talking

when I talk  
he doesn't need to listen  
I look him eye-to-eye

only in nightmare  
where on the scent  
of his most secret

secret each night  
I tear him  
limb from limb.

# The Maltese Falcon

## Alys Culhane

Those attending the Smith Family reunion watched, open-mouthed, as the boy's dog leapt out of his arms, then shot up into the cloudless blue sky.

The least surprised was the boy's father, who continued eating his hamburger. Wiping a blob of errant relish off his shirt, he remarked to onlookers that the animal's behavior was predictable. "After all," the parent said, "he's a bird dog."

His son, after putting thick, ketchup-strained fingers to lips, let loose with an ear-piercing whistle. The dog, who sometimes came and sometimes did not, ignored his owner's command. As the boy's mother thought, child and dog should have been sent to obedience school.

Seeing as her son was becoming agitated, the mother pushed him in the direction of the dessert table.

"Here," she said, putting a sagging paper plate in her son's hand. "Eat some rhubarb pie. It's good for you."

"My dog," the child wailed.

"Your dog will return when he's good and ready," interjected the father.

"What if he's never good and ready?" the child queried.

"Eat," the father said.

The Smith clan family members continued to watch, as the canine did loops, spins, cartwheels, and front and backhanded rolls. At dusk, they dispersed, leaving mother, father, and child to finish the clean-up.

The mother, in an indirect fashion, finally conceded that the pet was irretrievable.

"We should get going," she said, as she fastened the buttons of her baggy cardigan sweater. "It's getting cold."

"But my dog..."

It was as the child spoke that dog and family members heard the chorus of shrill yips. The dog, unable to contain himself, bolted in the direction of the flock. All remained quiet, that is until the pet was no more than a distant pepper fleck.

"Gone," said the father.

"Gone," said the mother.

"Gone," said the son, tossing the dog's leash skyward.

187

Simon Perchik

This watchband kept alive  
pulled over my wrist —what you hear  
are paws —the hours disappear  
stumbling to the end

—you hear its loping gait  
in circles, restless —I try to waive  
or swipe or its heart still beating  
grasped till the sun —my hand

covered with blood and hammerblows  
and claws —this pelt kept warm  
full length, smelling from shovels and hope

as if a great tendon and over my head  
the Earth itself, the loosening  
—another ditch torn out  
—you can hear the dirt  
the shallow footholds, the hand to hand.

In the Entrance

Geri Rosenzweig

I  
Having forgotten the hunger of the hand,  
someone abandoned the knife, plunged  
the tip deep into the stained window sill  
of a fallen barn and walked away down  
country back roads patched with shadow.

II  
Before entering the half lit interior coded  
with torn sacks, clay cups of swallows  
on the beams, the light, hurrying in from  
the field, checks its image with the blade  
standing smart as a sentry in the entrance.

197

Simon Perchik

These wings I smooth :a dim light  
lifts off, my jacket  
hanging on to rotted sky and haze

and the attic still climbs  
banks into the storm —mice  
must love to fly —my wings

painted blue so long ago  
and somehow a cloud among this mess  
—it's cold up here

—box to box, the planes  
unpack, starting up  
—what the mice hear is the wait

to trap the sun :the polish  
gives so much away  
and now the sky

—what they hear is rain  
is the mad kept alive  
by breathing through their heart

—they hear the wind  
shaped by this furious rag  
kept empty, smelling from names.

## Reasonable Men

Jeff Vande Zande

Someone is coming up the driveway. Out from under the hood, frayed timing belt in my hand, I turn and see a man from up the street. Dress shirt and tie—kind of thing I'd only wear to a funeral. His sleeves flap around his arms, and I guess that whatever work he does he doesn't have to use his muscles. His face is angry, and he moves like he's going to plow right through me.

"Hey..." I start, but he plants his hands into my chest and shoves.

"You sonuvabitch!" he shouts.

"What the hell?" The back of my head sizzles where it banged against the hood. I steady myself. If he shoves me again I'm not even going to teeter. Then I'm going to knock the little fucker's teeth down his throat. I've been in fights with guys a helluva lot bigger than him.

He starts telegraphing a punch. I'm ready to block it and drop my right fist into his breadbasket. Then a whimpering from the street distracts both of us. The guy turns around. I could put an arm around his neck and rabbit punch his kidneys for the next two days. I know this guy's never been in a fight—not a real one.

"Daddy, don't fight," a little boy cries from a bicycle.

I recognize him immediately. Two hours ago I'd had him by the neck. I'd held him off the ground and shook him.

My ex-wife had dropped our son Billy off that morning. Some kids came over and asked to play with him. They're a little older than Billy, but I let them play in the backyard because I'd built a great swing set with two slides, blister bars, and a canopied sandbox. I like to see kids enjoying it.

Popping the hood an hour later, I heard Billy crying—kind of screaming that brings images of broken bones, missing fingers, deep puncture wounds. I never moved so fast. In the backyard, Billy lay crumpled in front of the swing set. The other kids were frozen. Boy at the top of a slide. Little girl on a swing. Another boy was not far from Billy, and he was holding Billy's red hat in his hand, the one with the earflaps. My dad gave Billy that hat. Just last week I'd put the hat on Billy and it fit perfectly. The old man had given me a hat just like it when I was a kid. He died last month.

I checked Billy. Nothing seemed broken. No blood.

I looked at the other kids, but they hadn't moved. The boy was still holding Billy's hat. Something took hold of me. Both of my hands closed around his neck and I picked him up. His little legs dangled.

"Little bastard, you little bastard. What the hell did you do? What the..." I

was in enough control to see his eyes go out of focus. I set him on the ground. The other kids were gone. After he got some air, the boy started to cry nearly as loudly as Billy had.

“Now you know...” I had started to say, but he got up and ran. I held Billy until his short, quick breaths died down. The hat lying on the grass reminded me of my father. He taught me everything I know about fixing things and about being a man. He didn’t believe that a man should cry, so I didn’t. Still, I felt like I could. Eventually Billy fell asleep.

Now the little boy is back. His father can’t get him to go home.

“All right, then you tell him what you told me,” the man says.

“Look...” I start to say, but the man puts a finger in my face and tells me to shut up.

I do.

“Tell him,” the man says.

“The hat...” the little boy begins, everything pretty broken up with sobbing, “I had the hat...I was holding it...Jenny was swinging...Billy walked in front... she hit him with her feet...accidentally...knocked him down...knocked his hat off...I picked it up...I didn’t hurt him.”

The news sets me on the grill of my car. “I just thought...” I start to say.

“You just thought what...you could kill my kid for taking a HAT?”

I see the punch telegraphing again, but I don’t even roll with it. It lands against my cheek like a two-by-four and knocks me to the ground. When I look up, I can see the way he’s holding his hand. He’s not going to throw another punch.

“If you ever touch my kid again, I’ll kill you,” he says and starts down the driveway, still cradling his fist.

His son is in awe of him, and I guess that this is my apology. The boy will always have this memory and know that his dad is a real man. This will be the day daddy knocked out the roofer from down the street. Eventually, they’ll move—nobody stays in the neighborhood for long. The story will go with them. Then I’ll be faceless, probably bigger, more threatening, a wrench in my hand.

It will get around, but I’ll be able to explain it to friends. What was I supposed to do? Tear this guy apart in front of his boy? Nobody will doubt that I could have knocked his dick in the dirt, and they’ll probably respect my reasoning.

Using the car to get to my feet, I can feel my cheek throbbing. Then I hear something near the house. It’s Billy at the screen door. He’s up from his nap, but he’s crying. “My daddy, my daddy,” he sobs. I remember hearing something about five marking the age that kids begin to hold onto their memories. I charge down the driveway and into the street. The first punch lands on the back of his head.

# Blind Spots

## Jon Boilard

His feet were so bad he couldn't wear shoes. He couldn't bend his fingers. He gave me ten bucks to mow his lawn and watched me from his metal chair and cursed at me when I ran over branches that fell from the dying elm on the edge of his property. When I finished he told me to go next door to Gray's Package Store for a six pack of Budweiser. He said if they said anything to tell them I was working for Dutch Noska. They did say something so I told them and they looked up and waved out the window at him. Dutch said Boy if you can work like a man then you can drink like a man. Then we went out in his Monte Carlo for my lesson and took the back roads through Hatfield and Whately. He talked about arthritis and diabetes. He told me that his wife was laid off and the pothead needed more money and the fucking marine wanted to come live with him.

We crossed Stillwater Bridge and stopped and watched other town kids climb to the third knot of the rope swing and tarzan yell into the Deerfield River. They swam back and pulled themselves up by roots and small trees. We took Hoosac's Road to 116 and the center of Conway where Phil Ostroski had a side job pouring concrete. Phil clapped Dutch on the shoulder and said I see you got yourself a new chauffeur. Then we parked in front of Streeter's and I ran in to buy some Gummi Bears with a handful of coins Dutch gave me from his ashtray. Then Top Jimmy was throwing hay in his uncle's fields and I tapped the horn until he looked up and waved. I drove fast on Lower Road past rows and rows of corn and Danny Devine's yard filled with busted farm equipment and naked children chasing a tired pointer with fallen weeping willow limbs. Dutch said he felt bad for that old dog trying to find a slice of shade for a dream or two. As we went by the hound raised his syrupy eyes and the AM radio spilled polka into early autumn.

Dutch called my father Hamburger Helper. My father didn't cook and he used my lawn mowing money to support his bad habits and in the summer he wanted my cucumber money for rent. Dutch said that there was no sense in figuring on it too much but he wished that we just had each other instead of all the rest. When he was a young man he fought Koreans. When he returned from war he got a job fixing things for the state police. He used to play cards all night at the Polish Club with Blacky and Fat Mike who wouldn't even talk to him anymore. We went back to his house when we finished the beer and I practiced reversing into his garage. I was going to be fourteen in November. Dutch said Don't forget about blind spots and stop squaring your turns.

From his front porch that leaned to one side we saw Sugarloaf Mountain muscle up green and granite toward clouds precarious and into a sky bright

and blue. And across Pioneer Valley wildflowers poured hot from the hills, magenta and yellow and orange spilling thick as lava to the banks of the river. Beneath the bubbling sunset, an unseasonal and hard wind foreshadowed winter's cold down out of Canada and the Berkshires and sugarcoated the scene with the sweet smell of amethyst. Dutch said Boy you better get me inside before I catch my death out here.

I eased him into his chair that had casters and pushed him into the house because he was tired. He said to put him in front of the television and fetch him a blanket even though it was already warm. I watched Wheel of Fortune with him snoring until his wife got back from rotary. She gave me some stuffed bell peppers from their garden and warm rolls from Hebert's. The chain fell off my bike on the way home so I left it in a ditch near Milewski's and walked the rest of the way. My father was smoking in his favorite green chair in the living room with the lights off. I nodded at the orange tip of his cigarette but he didn't say anything so I went upstairs and ate the peppers and rolls beside the window in my room and smelled neighbors doing laundry.

To the sound of generators at Oxford Pickle and an idling 18-wheeler in front of the Huppy's house I dreamed of the grave digger we saw walking on 5 & 10. Dutch told me those who knew him at all knew him only as Buzzard. He'd been around for what must have been twenty years. All he owned was what we see with him right then. Except the shovel. That belonged to the firehouse. He didn't do anything regular all year long. Didn't pick tobacco or paint barns or mend fences. But he got a meal every day and a jacket every winter. Because he was the grave digger. Four or five times a year they gave him that shovel and filled his belly a little extra and got him drunk and sent him off to do the job nobody else wanted. Dutch told me they took good care of him because you've got to have a grave digger. There was one before Buzzard and there'll be another after he's gone. I told him it didn't seem like such a great job to aspire to. Dutch said There are things in this life that aren't suited for every man. But the key is to go out and find your position before you become rotten inside. He said That kind of rotten eats you like cancer.

The next day when I went back for my bike with some oil and a flat head screwdriver Junior Milewski came out and told me he saw the ambulance last night. I got the dirt and everything out of my chain and gears and when I arrived Dutch's wife told me he wouldn't take his medicine again so they had to cut his legs off. My father wouldn't drive me to Cooley Dick for visiting hours because he didn't have any gas. I hitchhiked and Dutch told me how the pretty nurse washed him with a sponge. He asked me to keep the lawn short and take the Monte Carlo up the road to burn the carbon out. Later that week his wife phoned me crying and told me that the doctors said it was unrelated but she knew it was because he could not bear to live like that. I

tended his yard up until after the funeral and the fucking marine moved in with his girlfriend.

The pothead sent flowers from somewhere in Florida where he was winning money on the pro-am bowling tour. The fucking marine put the Monte Carlo up on blocks in the back. He told me he could make more cash parting it out than if he tried to sell it whole. He told me he couldn't give me anything for working on the grounds no matter what the old man promised before he shit the bed. I said Don't worry about it because Dutch taught me how to drive. I said I can keep taking care of the grass because I feel bad about what happened and want to help. I told him I owed Dutch that much because he was there for me when I needed him. The fucking marine laughed until he coughed and spit and said That mean old bastard got exactly what he deserved.

## Moving

Paul D. McGlynn

Just keep going, somewhere. I don't know,  
Got to get someplace better than before.  
The road goes on like a jumbled sentence,  
Grammar of barns and billboards,  
Jesus Saves, Fine Food One Mile, Fresh Eggs.

You used to call me, tell me you were naked;  
That's all behind, where I used to be.  
No lover phones me now. Where am I headed?  
Homemade cross, some daisies. Someone died,  
Along this curve, that hill, the meadow,  
Near that line of willows by the stream.  
Patrick's Creek, he died, smash, like that.  
Old white horse. Sneakers on a power line.

Weak sunshine, vague gray clouds. Two crows.  
The highway runs till it ends; that's it.  
Another little shrine: crooked cross, plastic roses.  
I know you'll never call again. I'm moving,  
Just moving. And that's it, that's my destination.

# Vision

## Hedy Habra

Now a mural,  
the page  
stretches, calling for paint,  
brushes, a ladder.  
Words with clipped wings  
stumble,  
scattered here and there,  
clothes  
thrown in haste  
as you rush  
into a lover's arms.  
Two androgynous silhouettes  
engage  
in an elegant tango,  
twist and turn,  
limbs bent in unison.

Later, when light after light  
has been put out,  
when oak branches brush  
roofs and windows, filling  
the house with murmurs,  
when every sound,  
a menace,  
you rest in inkwell darkness.

Feathers escape their cotton  
prison, circle  
like maddened fireflies,  
bonfire sparks,  
you think of midnight rides in a Felukah  
along the glistening Nile,  
of the way timid lovers  
wrote ephemeral messages,  
with their  
lighted cigarettes.

A cloud of down  
fills the room,  
schools of flashing fish  
slither  
on the walls of your waking.  
Following a ray of moon,  
you yearn  
for a sliver of diamond,  
reach for paper, pen, to keep  
the vision alive,  
but it melts into water, vanishes  
as you hold on tight to your  
feather pillow.

"nothing to save us at last save loss itself"  
—A. R. Ammons

## Janet Krauss

We have our way to hold close  
those who have passed  
in a sensory cache we keep  
hermetically sealed  
so their colors do not fade  
and sighs cannot erase  
their fine details.

We can replay the scenes  
at any time: a mother serving  
tea with honey as the sun sets,  
rose-hued, relieving  
the grime on the porch rail;  
a father walking up a hill,  
his hand on his hat  
to keep it in place  
against a gust of wind;  
a 3-day-old infant failing  
to keep alive, revisiting  
years later as a welcome  
weight of sorrow  
a friend smiling,  
binding one to her  
as if by an unseen, tensile  
thread, as she leans near.

And outdoors, we find solace  
in winter trees  
leaning over the water.  
They hold fast, and are true.  
to the knowledge of loss  
in their reflection.

## Disappointment Janet Krauss

It learns to suckle you.  
Your nipples numbed  
from its sharp, little teeth.  
You accept and welcome it,  
part of your being.  
It runs into your arms  
and fits so comfortably  
you cradle it.  
You carry it with you  
in the pocket of your jacket,  
and it waits until the end  
of the day to go home,  
to remind you to hold it  
close, nurse it  
with internal sighs  
and kindness.

In its time it will wean  
itself away.

# Friday Night Fights

Janet Krauss

I sit in the center of the hassock  
next to my father's chair.  
It is 9 P.M.  
The comfort of shadows  
surrounds us. We watch the tv  
where Gillette Calvacade of Sports  
blazes forth its theme song.  
He places a digitalis pill  
under his tongue.  
He sits on the edge of his seat.  
I know he will be all right.  
It is only a fight we watch,  
remote from our lives.

We thrill to the amplified voice  
of the referee: "In this corner..."  
We thrill to the sound  
of the bells ending  
and beginning each round  
like chapters in a novel  
that build to a climax.  
Will it be a clean match,  
no grudges or blows  
below the belt?  
How will our man behave?  
Is his uppercut strong,  
his left hook? Will he rise  
from the floor  
before the counting ends  
to score a knockout win?

In between punches  
we discuss each man's strategy:  
Joe Louis's heroic moves,  
Sugar Ray's dance,  
Johanneson's hard rights.  
Ali's poetics. We float  
on their triumphs.

As the tension builds  
blood drips, sweat leaps  
and labored breaths push out  
mouth guards.  
The screen lights up our faces.  
Our love for each other  
expands the narrow walls  
of the apartment,  
transcends the brutal  
spectacle we call art,  
and know as some strong thing  
that brings us together  
apart from my mother  
nursing her hurt and dreams

as she rocks  
by the bedroom window  
a square of slate.  
Beyond no perspective  
is possible.

## Crying Yes

Paul D. McGlynn

The Gulf before us flat as a kitchen table.  
One red sail three miles out  
In salacious abandon against the blue  
Like lovers' laughter, heads thrown back,  
Never more free than now, this only time.  
This honey instant  
When he cries she cries Yes.

The sail tacks back.  
South more now, seas up a bit.  
White water, gulls in wheeling chaos to the east;  
The red, half sunk toward Caribbean latitudes.  
Disappears below the line.  
Painted for us with ocular certainty.  
The carnal world is round again.

## Eclipse

Barry Ballard

Your far-off voice, drugged with milk and sleep, said it was a leaf  
sliding over the light.

—Stanley Kunitz, *Journal for My Daughter*

Let me believe your daughter when she saw  
a leaf sliding its shadow over the moon.  
Let me imagine, for a moment, all  
those particulars of history making room  
for themselves in the haze of the lunar  
landscape. Maybe the victims of Auschwitz  
carving their names around the spill of craters  
bisecting Plato's dark floor. Or the gift

of Frost's aging voice inside the ringed  
mountain Aristotle, filling it like  
a sea with amethyst and dancing flowers.  
Or maybe your own shadow from the edge  
of the road, an expert in farewells, serene  
and poised like Tycho's rays tracing off the distance.

# History as Dream

## Curtis Smith

The boy enters the barn before sunrise. He's forgotten the lantern again, won't return to the house to fetch it for fear of the whistling sting of his father's riding crop. The boy delivers wet hay to the stalls, and the darkness stirs with the faint, rhythmic grinding of horse teeth. On his way back to the house, the boy comes upon a footstep path that leads across the snowy pasture. His brother has run away, this time for good. The boy tries to follow but his legs are too short to match his brother's bounding strides, and he stumbles repeatedly in the waist-high drifts. The unlocked barn doors swing open, a groan of rusty hinges, and out gallop the horses. The horses dance around the boy's father, their hooves kicking snow, their snorts and whinnies mocking the old man's vain attempts to corral them. "You idiot!" his father cries and an icy wind lifts his nightshirt over his head. The dangling, half-plucked chicken of his father's sex sickens the boy. "You shit-for-brains! Do you see what you've done?" The boy runs inside and sets his wet clothes by the stove. Puddles of melted snow surround his shed boots. The boy opens the stove door and throws his father's riding crop onto the red coals. In a breath, the boy is a young man. His clothes and boots are dry, a perfect fit for his new, yet familiar form. His mother's body lies on the kitchen table. One last time, he tenderly dabs iodoform to her cancerous lesions. Even in death she winces, bites her lip. A light ebbs through the kitchen's frosted windows, the sunrise kidnapped by muzzle flashes, the starshine-spitting dance of twisting flares. In the grassless pasture, the horses bend their long necks and tear into his father's corpse. The young man touches his mother's face, but her jawbone dislodges like the leg of an overcooked chicken. Her detached face becomes a gas mask, and the young man's twin reflections stare back from the wide, goggled eyes.

The sergeant's shrill whistle knifes into the silence and the kitchen clock's stalled pendulum resumes its swing. The young man fits the mask over his face. His mother rises, gropes blindly for the stove door. She buries her bare hand in the burning coals. "Take these," she says, somehow speaking without the benefit of a mouth. She dumps the coals, which include the serpent-like ember of his father's riding crop, into the young man's jacket pocket where they glow like the heart of Jesus. The back door banging behind him, the young man flees the house of his youth, running alongside the horses whose grinning mouths are adorned with strips of flesh. "To war!" the horses cry. Shells whistle around the young man, the gray, smoky sky ripped asunder with breath-stealing concussions, the screams of wounded men. Here is the grand scale of life! Here is the blood and fire and the

operatic majesty of his dreams! Bayonet fixed, he charges across the barren, scarred earth. "To war!" he yells, echoing the beasts' cry, certain that today the light is upon him, that he will not die, but with his next step, he's swallowed in mud. The quagmire chokes him, oozes down his gullet and settles in his lungs. The young man claws and fights, and with a shuddering gasp, he emerges into the daylight. The shells have stopped falling. The birds sing for the first time in four years. All around him, his comrades are pulling themselves from the muck, the field blooming with muddy, disheartened men, and one by one, they join the shuffling, lice-infected exodus. Skeletal horses strain beneath the yokes of the endless ambulance wagons. There are no brass bands waiting across the Rhine, no pretty girls throwing flowers. On they march, absorbed by the Fatherland. Their numbers dwindle at each crossroad and rail station. The young man's rifle is confiscated, but he keeps his gas mask, sliding it down his pants where his mother's lips fumble toward his shriveled testicle. "There is only love and shame," she tells him. Her teeth rip his sack and her breath plays his emaciated form like a wheezing bagpipe on the cold night he tries to bed down an Essen whore. Along the way, the young man coughs up battlefield mud. He spits each mouthful into his hand, and along the shadowy fringe of the soldiers' nightly fire, he molds the mud into tiny statues of his betrayers and hardens them next to his heart of glowing coals.

A diet of plots and schemes and scintillating visions usher the young man into adulthood. Back home, his uncle calls him a loafer, but the no-longer-young man sees himself as a mystic, a truth-seeker in the age of iron and steel. This is what he's come to know: there is only war, only blood, only will and flesh, only the victor and the vanquished, only master and slave. The light that shone upon him on the battlefield now glows as bright as the moon, a pinpoint shaft of heavenly, icy brilliance, and when he opens his mouth, the light transforms into speech, his words imbued with the power to seduce a table of his disciples or a stadium of thousands. Standing before a microphone, gazing over a sea of brownshirts and red, rippling flags, he is less a man than a radio of the gods. No proof is needed beyond the shouting approval of the masses. swooning women throw him their room keys, slip perfumed vows of love under his hotel doors. ("They are not to be trusted," warns his mother as she rolls his peanut testicle across her slippery tongue.) With a wave of his hand, the tanks clatter across the border, the sky blackened with formations of screeching dive-bombers. Each day another city raises its voice to wail the chorus of the defeated. Standing before his maps, he is the composer of the world's mightiest symphony, and the breath of a loyal and devoted nation stokes the coals of his conductor's heart. From the Seine to the Volga, the continents flow red. In darkened back rooms he lines up his statues of mud and settles old scores.

The gods test him. They replace the saliva of once-trusted men with venom, plague him with betrayals and incompetence and ill fortune. The burned wisp of his father's riding crop slithers between his ribs and hisses its scornful message—how could a muddle-headed child who left the barn door open lead a whole country? The empire shrinks, the spires and domes of his kingdom pummeled, the survivors swarming like ants amid the rubble, hacking down park trees for firewood, carving the flanks of dead horses for meat. In his dank, mildewed cave beneath the city, the lights flicker with each bomb blast. The ventilator hisses its weak current. He trembles during his sham of a wedding, a shaking triggered not by nerves or doom but by the butting, calf-like testicle suckling of his mother. Unable to mutter "I do," he simply nods.

He sits in an overstuffed chair far beneath his burning city. His newlywed bride lies blue-lipped and cold on a cot. The barrel of a pistol pressed against his temple, his lips quivering with fear and rage, he recalls the aroma of wet hay, the pleasing warmth of a shirt dried by a kitchen stove. He closes his tearing eyes, curses, and with a single shot, offers one last splash to his ocean of blood.

## Collapse

### Barry Ballard

The light from that blast reached us on July 4th, 1054. It was visible in daylight for over three weeks.

—Terry Holt  
*On the Crab Nebula supernova remnant*

If a star can project a sound (a song  
of mourning from the heavy iron core  
of stressed neutrons), then I wonder how long  
it would take for our conscience to explore  
the ashes of its three billion degree  
furnace. How long before we could see ourselves  
inside a finite history compressed like seed,  
inside a bright music that roars and melts?

How long before everything we've believed  
is imploded and ejected like scarlet  
folds of nebula: our story, our new  
beginning, convulsing as it bleeds  
for twenty-three days in broad daylight, etched  
across the sky like a soul we look through?

# This

Ben Mitchell

I remember riding in the car, mom and dad  
in the front. Adam wouldn't stay on his side. We  
were riding over a bridge in Connecticut  
with a metal guardrail and the clouds  
were low on the river, the red bottoms  
of white buoys peeking over the water.  
I was thinking through the details of what little I had lived—  
moving to the new house, the red kitchen floor  
which smelled like metal, the tree outside my window  
years before they cut it down, even bleeding,  
catching my penis in the zipper of that blue body suit with padded feet—all  
could be empty memories, everything I know  
blending into memory—sleep and visions. I look  
at the people, a boy older than myself  
my dad, my mom sitting on vinyl seats with children, driving.  
How can I be sure this isn't just the mist of a dream as well?  
Reverberations of someone else's image of this life.  
So I promise myself—this is real—this is happening.  
The black plastic handle of the door is vibrating  
in a car on a bridge in a land called Connecticut.  
I never stop like that anymore. Days and weeks  
and months and years blend, the endless blur  
of empty struggle, where each piece leads to more and more.  
Not like water passing over rocks toward some inevitable blending,  
but like a movie of that, a television documentary  
playing in another room, as I carve figures from a chunk of soap.  
I drink my coffee from a blue mug and go to work  
in a yellow building and pay bills to people I will never see  
and that is what it is. But what is it?  
The coffee table's made of brown wood.  
This pen writes with black ink.

## Indelible Lilacs

Ben Mitchell

Certain impressions linger  
in the body, linger like  
the smell of new lilacs—Remember  
that awkward conversation  
and the little leather boots she wore  
that very first night—  
an almost indelible stain, so you  
return to the aroma, pull it  
to your chests like  
a bouquet, but gently  
or it mixes in desire, wilting—  
see the blossoms fall in twisting  
spirals. Cling and hope  
the dying sticks still hold  
that fragrant stain. And yet,  
the tender thrum is always here,  
the flip of her hair in the dim street-light,  
the resonance of her voice, poised  
and naked, before  
the details—the laundry, preparing  
another pan of eggs,  
and the money and  
the money and the money.

## August Morning

Ben Mitchell

On the road, winding through  
the valley, I  
noticed a patch of red  
and orange on one particular  
branch. Here it was, superb  
blue sky, golden sun flooding  
the emerald vale, shimmering  
on every leaf like ice. And so it is  
again, that even now  
in August's humid glut that winter  
never leaves us. Sure,  
snow melts, trees bud and  
dangle comfortably  
with green, mountains thaw  
into streams that  
swell past brushed fields of heather. But  
always the shadow  
of ice is everywhere—the cracked  
plastic shovel leaning  
against the shed, the rusty plow  
for sale on the side  
of the road as I drive past—they whisper  
like the obituary  
of a childhood friend.

## building a past

john sweet

you beautiful  
in a white room

the baby asleep  
or maybe  
only dreamed of at  
this point

i remember autumn sunlight  
wet and shimmering  
and the silence that isn't  
silence but is only a lack of  
human noise

you were crying

you were about  
to cry

this isn't a  
specific memory but  
something pieced together

from random days in the season  
of slow despair

the woman who drowned  
her children  
in the name of love

the man she did it for

bitter ugly truths that held  
no morals  
and i remember  
the space between us  
filled with the smell  
of burning

i remember you closed  
your eyes and said  
*listen*

i remember waiting

## Labor Day

Carol Frith

I do not remember the child named Delaine,  
his blond hair radiant in the dark,  
nor the low wicker tables.

Judged by, I hear someone say,  
double words like an echo: used up.  
We are searching for song in the corners  
of the square yard, palms full of gravel—

Keep your own counsel, warns grandfather.  
I stretch this like a cat's cradle on the fingers  
of memory.

Delaine's small hand—mine—in the dark.  
Double words, single syntax.

There is no round flower, no white,  
concentric petals.

Two bells. Quick, chilled fingers  
handle the detail in the pattern.

I do not remember any such child, blond in  
the wicker chair. It has been a cold summer:  
blue.

## Devil in the Glass

(based on Robert Green's "A Crystal Glass  
for Christian Women," 1591, describing  
the death of the author's wife, Katherine)

### Carol Frith

Topical Cupid:  
Katherine, child bride, face  
like wax, Kate on her death bed,  
preaching dolor to the servants.  
The elders venture to object.

"Satan's hanging on a cross upon  
the wall," shouts Kate  
and the servants, heretics  
of passion, listen,  
ramrod straight.

More's the pity. A cup of tea  
for the cherub with the demons  
on the wall.

"Repent," moans Kate, "a little  
sugar. Yes indeed."

Merry tales. Blood and milk upon  
the waters.  
Shuddering with ague,  
a weary Satan straightens out  
his legs.

The servants shake and rave,  
"Soon the devil will be  
climbing from the wall."

"Why not nowe,"  
whispers Katherine,  
"Why not nowe?"

if i ask you  
john sweet

if i ask you for  
nothing more than the  
crown of christ  
and you turn away  
then what?

or if i ask you to  
name your child that was  
never born?

these are small boundaries  
that i push against

i will change your shape  
until it fits mine  
completely  
or i will drive you  
into hiding

each choice has  
the flavor of both  
victory and loss

each needs to be  
examined closely

we have  
the rest of our lives  
to destroy

Of Deeper Life  
Barry Ballard

...yet with how many things are we upon the brink  
of becoming acquainted, if cowardice or  
carelessness did not restrain our inquiries.  
—Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*

Already there is a disturbing voice,  
once invisible, emerging under  
the microscope. It shimmers in its single-  
cell body, boiling above a deep bulb  
of light that may as well be the moon (full  
of conscience from the eye above it, distilled  
from its tear duct like liquid glass). It adheres  
to nothing and struggles without choice

in its war against death, thorny with rage  
from having dripped from a whole life fighting  
against the world's lie. Already it prepares  
for arms, legs, and feet. It transcends its age,  
raising its fist for Frankenstein's lightening,  
screaming like a monster from everywhere.

## wednesday afternoon, suffocating john sweet

and the doctor says he  
needs to discuss everything  
that could go wrong with  
the next baby

the war continues  
without any  
hope of being won

it gets to that point where  
even the illusion  
of control vanishes

the sky huge  
and the sun enormous  
and not enough air

not enough warmth

i start apologizing for  
all of the pain i ye caused but  
no one listens

everyone has left or died

they have god or prozac or  
secret lovers  
to help bury their pain

they have pieces  
of the one true cross but are  
blind to the blood  
that stains it

are blind to the fact that  
words determine the future

that some among us have  
the power to write down  
what the truth will be

and there is nothing  
to call a gift this brutal  
but religion

## Passed Kelley Jean White

I am in the threads of the crewel-work  
Christmas stockings, tight stitches and knots,  
faded color worn where fingers stayed a moment  
too long to rub the imperfect work: the work  
always rushed towards the child's first December,  
marked in seconds stolen from responsibility and sense,  
a gift for a child who I wanted to be immortal,  
a gift from these hands I could not accept they might forget.

# Hometown

Emily Van Kley

High school kids still gather nights in the school parking lot, their trucks rumbling loud, moon glinting sideways off the dents. They pass cigarettes and water bottles filled with Jack Daniel's, walk away in twos to press their bodies into the dark of building corners.

My brother and I used to play basketball in our driveway, dribbling carefully around the maple stump that had begun to push its way through the blacktop and tripping where driveway tumbled into the confusion of pavement and gravel which was our street. He'd rebound for me, even when my shots ended in the pine tree just right of the hoop.

There was a group home on my block and Dorothy would stop on the street in front of my house whenever I was outside. Nice day, she'd say, even if the snowbanks were piled up to my second story windows. One night I watched her skip down the street making small noises like bubbles in her throat as Bob chased her, his pants unzipped as always, one hand outstretched and the other spread over his crotch.

I remember once I thought I was in love, lying against a boy in the passenger seat of his car. He'd parked behind the right field fence of the softball diamond so that we were invisible from the road and he took off his clothes while I listened for dirt bikes on the trails through the woods around us.

# The Last Supper

A. McIntyre

We could hear the drums beyond the walls, the monotonous rhythm like the heartbeat of a vast creature. Every minute, like clockwork, a thudding boom made the building shudder. Dust settled onto the table from the ceiling. Easter. We only had a day to live. Only hours perhaps. They had special ways of killing.

A drop more wine old chap? Caruthers leaned across with the bottle. Lots more in the cellar, but we won't have time. Shame really.

Thanks, I replied, handing him my glass.

He smiled, To the gods old man, to the gods. He lit a cigar, shutting his eyes, and he leaned back in the chair.

We'd fought our way in after a week traveling through stench and black clouds of flies feeding on blood. I had never seen anything like it, the massacres, the mutilation. I gazed at the smoldering remains of the town. A ragged figure stumbled toward me across the parade ground, saluting in the shimmering heat. Caruthers, Major Caruthers, dashed glad to see you old man, not many of us left you know. I saluted, unable to believe that I was seeing an officer of the Empire.

With a bandaged hand, he gestured vaguely at the broken men around him.

All officers dead, just these fellows left. He laughed, But by gad sir you showed the devils, what a charge, what a fight, top hole what, you really showed them.

They were piling the bodies of the dead, ready to burn, the smell of pitch reminding me of rugby fields.

How many men do you have? I asked.

Fifty, he replied, Maybe less. Women and children dead. Any chance of reinforcements?

I don't know, I said. I sent scouts, when I saw the scale of it. What happened? What in God's name happened?

Caruthers chuckled, then began to laugh aloud, as if someone had told a particularly amusing anecdote. In God's name you said, in God's name... He was doubled over, whether through pain or laughter, I couldn't see. His men were laughing too, low savage laughter, quite out of place under the circumstances. A thin line of blood trickled down his face through the bandage around his head. He staggered slightly. The laughter faded away.

You ought to rest, I said.

He leaned against me supporting himself on my shoulder. I'll tell all old

man, he murmured regaining control, I'll tell all. Hear? It seems to be quieter. Come on, I'm sure you could eat. A drop of wine'll put us right, old boy.

The smell of the burning bodies had begun to spread, but to my surprise I found I was hungry.

The rebels were ramming the gates using a contraption invented by the Romans. The candle fluttered, the frost signaling the beginning of winter. The stars shone unnaturally bright, and I could see the Southern Cross. Caruthers cut into the bread. Sorry we've nothing else to eat, old chap.

I couldn't eat much, I admitted. Damned good wine though.

Splendid, agreed Caruthers.

So what happened? I ventured, What went wrong? The colony was prospering.

Caruthers stared at me, one eye twitching. It was the monkeys old boy, the monkeys.

The monkeys? I asked thinking that he had lost his mind.

Caruthers cleared his throat, Yes. The monkeys. We sat in silence as I waited for him to continue his strange explanation. He drank some wine and resumed, And the Bishop. You know who our bishop was, don't you?

Yes, I replied recalling a name, Bishop Stanforth wasn't it?

Caruthers smiled, Exactly, Stanforth. Bishop John Stanforth. A fine fellow really, even if he was a pompous ass.

I interrupted, I met him once, I believe, in Cairo, briefly, about five years ago.

That's the man, agreed Caruthers, He used to be in Cairo. Before that he was Bishop of Rangoon. Well, he was a funny chap really. Used to feed the monkeys every morning and every evening, on his walk to and from the Palace, twice a day, like clockwork, without fail. Seemed to regard the monkeys as part of his congregation. Really an odd chap, most odd. No one paid much attention. The natives liked him. And the monkeys, the monkeys seemed to love him. They waited for him, dozens of them, they even knew the time. It was all rather a lark. Went on for a couple of years. Malicious tongues used to say they were his most faithful followers. He even joked how he wished his flock were of the same caliber.

I chuckled.

Caruthers stared at me, his eyes bright yellow in the dim light. Well one day, he forgot to bring food in the evening. He didn't think anything of it, obviously, because he set off as usual across the park. And the monkeys tore him to pieces.

Good God, I said, still not understanding the connection with the rebellion.

Yes, Caruthers mumbled. There was not much of him left. Poor old

they killed the monkeys. Poisoned them. Every single one. I was against it, for obvious reasons, I'm sure you understand.

Yes, I said, I'm beginning to understand now...

Caruthers interrupted, You see, the monkeys had been there for centuries, generation after generation. Look at the carvings on the local temples. It's obvious. Even though they go to church, the natives still worship them. The monkeys are icons, connected to the Great Creator and all that, I'm sure you know. Which was one reason why the bishop was so popular. He fed them, and the natives loved him for it. Funny, really, isn't it? And something prophesied in one of their books that when the monkeys all die it's the end of the world. So when the monkeys were poisoned—

Of course, I said, Of course, and it's been like this ever since?

Caruthers nodded gravely. Yes.

Then there's not much hope is there? I muttered.

No, said Caruthers. Very little.

A huge jolt shook the building, covering us with dust. Caruthers stood up. My God, they've blown the gate. A vast cheer drowned out the muskets as hundreds of rebels poured into the fort, the noise merging into the single furious roar of a great beast. Caruthers stumbled towards a shelf.

Here, take this, it's better that way. He pushed a decanter of dark red liquid towards me. Laudanum, you won't know anything. Drink it, hurry.

Hesitating, I started to fill my glass. Strange isn't it, I said suddenly realizing. Ending like this. With bread and wine, have you thought? And Easter.

Shaking, Caruthers turned, and he started to shout: More bloody mumbo jumbo. Just like the monkeys. And look where it's got us. If only we could all do without it, if only we could get on without it. He raised the laudanum and was about to drink.

Wait, I said, Please wait, you...

For what, he interrupted, The Second Coming? A brief shout of laughter, and he tipped the cup, swallowing the contents.

## Of Course,

We Really Wouldn't Want To Have Lived in the Mesozoic Era

Jane McClellan

How like us humans to magnify our powers,  
to computerize and film  
    a pterodactyl and Tyrannosaur  
being overcome by space-age humans  
    who confront our fears,  
disguised in whatever shapes monsters may take.

    While scientists debate  
the cause of dinosaurian extinction—perhaps  
    an asteroid or a comet  
hung impenetrable shades between earth and sun,  
    perhaps not—  
children are lining up weird plastic lumps  
that resurrect the monsters, somewhat shrunk.

    Meanwhile, the lowly rodent  
is trapped to a strangle or poisoned or shot.  
    The ancestor we don't want to claim,  
progenitor that out-gened the dinosaur,  
whose primal gift—selfish endurance—we disclaim.

When a rustling in the attic  
    wakes us from a restless dream,  
it's all-out warfare, us or them:  
a reminder of their ability to out-endure their betters,  
a recognition of the fragility we've evolved to.  
    A balance that could shift  
with a hit from an oversized rock flung from  
    somewhere out in space  
by whatever gave us life and now it tired of our games.

## Beginnings,

a Fragment  
Jane McClellan

Half covered over  
  in leaf mold,  
                          translucent stem reaching up,  
its dicotyledon  
  enclosed, folded—  
  
                                  a chrysalis with butterfly wings  
                          compressed to a bud  
  
a worm of a blossom  
  
  infant embryo,  
                          paired limbs curled,  
symmetry of a head  
  waiting to break into light—  
  
so few patterns, so many variations.

## Taking Time

Jane McClellan

They emptied out of two vans.  
One walked with a hand  
on another's arm, her eyes unfocused.  
A young man clung to a walker  
he clanged at every step.  
And the happiest girl  
wore the face of Down syndrome.

At an off hour for a fast food  
they were welcome pay.  
They took their snacks  
to the back tables and crowded in  
so close their arms touched.

One man sat to himself, skimming  
the hot fudge off his sundae  
in hurried bites. When a fly  
settled on his table, he spooned  
out a dollop of cream, then watched  
as the fly fed, its stomach  
swelling and turning lighter.

Sometimes I have to walk away  
from so much gentleness.

## Grandpa's Clock

Jane McClellan

A proud Seth Thomas, it centered the mantel,  
telling the days with an arcing sun, the nights  
with an arcing moon that rode across its face.  
Supper done, butterscotch pie sweet on our tongue,  
cards were shuffled for setback between Grandpa  
and Grandma, Old Maid between Grandma and me.  
I kept one eye on the picture cards, one on the rising moon.

Then Grandpa would hoot his win, yawn, kiss goodnight,  
and thump up the stairs, leaving Grandma and me  
to finish the pie and wash it down with milk.  
Feather pillows eased me onto the sofa,  
a prim Duncan Phyfe, where Grandma sat and rubbed  
my feet while reading aloud whatever story I'd brought—  
one I could read by myself if, as she said, I'd a mind to.

I always fell asleep before the moon climbed to 12  
on old Seth Thomas's face, and I never recalled  
my parents bundling me home. Between the moon's  
rise and fall, time and movement merged,  
as in dreams one face focuses, then fades to another,  
and the clock still moves through its numbered pace.

## Advice from Don Juan Jane McClellan

Mothers, refrain from teaching your daughters  
to play hard-to-get.  
The artifice sets up an equation  
with one solution,  
a syllogism any fool can complete.

After the long withholding,  
the coy smile, the lidded gaze,  
comes a power surge of response—its climax?  
The current snaps  
in one wildly flaring synapse.

Then the recriminations.  
*Why haven't you phoned?*  
*Where were you last night?*  
As if I hadn't paid for what was given.

Tell your daughters to think of tennis:  
mastery follows lots of practice  
with varied and experienced players.  
As for love?  
Remember tennis.

## May 28

What Would Have Been  
My Mother's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday

### Lyn Lifshin

once covered with stars, the  
white petals just stud the edge  
of the dogwood. On the day  
she was born, record breaking  
heat. 97 in 1911. Here, it's  
raw and grey. I'm in my New  
York house, first time in half  
a year. Her pocket book in  
the closet as if any moment  
she'd come back, ready to  
take off for Macy's. All  
yesterday I swept off webs  
and the wings of dead  
insects, dried up wings.  
One morning I tried to reach  
my mother thru the Morse  
Code of words on the page  
but the only answer: squirrels  
skittering across the room  
and my 20 year old cat  
moaning in her sleep, maybe  
dreaming she could leap  
up to drink from faucets  
whose water is cold as  
underground springs

## Matins

Kelley Jean White

I keep imagining the body of God naked,  
radiating meaning and significance and voice.  
—Li-Young Lee

I have needed to lay my skin  
on a sunwarmed stone. Even my palm  
has not touched rock, my face feels only sad  
air and dim autumn light waking and passing  
the harsh electric rooms of probe and exam.  
I touch no green with anything but my teeth;  
only filth passes my fingers and a tissue  
of false protection. A child, I lay under skies  
that grew to the hem of eagles and heard grass  
singing wisdoms my grandmothers had forgotten.  
I knew the taste of clover and wild strawberry  
and the scent of the flower that lives  
in the shaded shallows of the brook. I knew  
the embrace of the arched tree and the bed  
the deer made beneath pines in the snow.  
I read the color of light in ice caves  
under lake and on the belly of a living  
fish I sang I sang. Knowing no one  
heard. These days fleeter than two hours  
bent over form and protocol under my heavy  
head, these eyes which never wake to starsong  
darkmusic or a bird at midnight.

## Who Owns

the Sperm of Dead Men

Lyn Lifshin

in the Health Section  
where the young girl  
is close to dying. "Post  
Mortem Sperm Procurement  
25 requests of 82 honored."  
I think of the women booted  
out of your life, standing  
in line. "Sperm can be taken  
by several different procedures  
up to 24 hours after death."  
Women, wild for something  
of you, something more  
than your blue shirt, photo  
graphs of your ice blue eyes  
to pull deep into their flesh  
as if to keep you

# Jorge Monsterman Strikes Again

## George Bandy

“Caps off!” demands the roll call officer.

With shaved pates glistening, the men in our cubicle stand rigid, already frozen in the near freezing weather. We see the others in the yard. We know not to look, but are drawn to their civilian garb and careless presence.

You see in their faces, the young men, bewilderment that their first time from home is to be with us. We the foul, unshaven, unscented, unfed—sack of bones—with all our bewilderment worried out, the roots no longer discernable. But a few, the few, the old-timers who’ve exceeded their life expectancy of nine months several times over and some like myself who have become Methuselah, having lived a dozen lifetimes, await. We are not accidents—we concentrationaires—schooled in survival, schooled in lasting by holding onto that tiny bit of humanity, the seed waiting to bloom somewhere and sometime. These new little ones so lost...they turn to us. We say nothing. We watch. Some will become what we call Mohammedans, not Muslim, but because they’re no longer concerned with this world; they walk dragging their feet and with eyes downturned—there is nothing they wish to face. Everything will be taken from them. Everything has. Everything.

A few, the few, will become ancient having mastered the inevitable—it is not life we preserve, it is the seed.

Then there are the Jorge Monstermans who trade what is not theirs, give cheaply their selves. The new men—boys not even out of the chrysalis—he greets and offers his protection and friendship. We say nothing...we ancients, who know all the world and every variety of man and beast.

Some child/boy without a father to lead him to his place in the world, a child that’s never been given the gift that must be passed along at the right time. A child stunted and destined never to reach his full-growth. It is different for us, we old-timers.

Jorge Monsterman is the kapo, a powerful man/beast. He thinks he will survive, he thinks he has. He thinks he knows the world and, like us, he knows it to be no larger than a planter’s box. He still has passions...little fiery bulbs that make him think—*Ah! This is what life is.* We ancients know. After you’ve lived several lifetimes you begin to let go those passions, especially the ones to explain and catalog. Niccolo Machiavelli says in *The Prince* that there are two kinds of intelligence, but there is only one. It’s not fair to expect him to know it or even to recognize it. As I’ve said, we are ancients.

Life makes logicians of us all.

The new boys line up at Jorge Monsterman’s command. See. He is brusque, he is louder than the guard, and he never hits. The guard enjoys

seeing the blood rush from their faces, when the boys realize they belong to us—the bony Mohammedans, the mumbling mad, the terrified, and, yes, even poor Jorge. *How good would it be to be the heavy lidded, square jawed, blue-eyed, tall, perfect god?* The guard's lost his patience and struck a laggard. Jorge Monsterman stands between them, with his back to the guard, trying his damndest to use all the words of shame and filth to make the boy come back to this world. The guard pleased, pats Jorge Monsterman on the back and tells him what a good German he'd make, if he wasn't a queer.... If he hadn't been born to dogs...or if...but all of that is over. The guard on his platform above the muck, exhales puffs of steam as if affirming that it's hard work being a god. Yet for one moment, we all want to be this god, with wife and family somewhere, and to be able to walk through that gate of wrought iron—"ARBEIT MACHT FREI"—and away from our promised redemption.

Jorge Monsterman smiles at the boys and they understand his goodness—he meant nothing, words were only words. Then Jorge Monsterman assigns the barracks and gives his survival course of four words: "Do-As-I-Say." They nod. This cannot be so bad, they think. Even so the greasy smoke of bones whizzes above—their brothers, sisters, fathers, mothers, the unknown.

As they shiver and cross the ankle deep mud and as Jorge Monsterman's kind arm covers the shoulders of a handsome, frightened boy, we turn away. The boy will become his conquest, his bit of fluff, his traditional cherry without the pit. We have seen it before—done better and with more feeling, done into, done under, done.... Jorge Monsterman, because he was a man once, shows a carefully folded rectangle—I know, because I saw it myself when I was a boy. He unfolds the rectangle of slick magazine paper, and there, reproduced in full color, with only a few crease lines, is his "Hound's Truth," prize winner of the Paris Art Invitational of 1933. And his dirty fingernail, blunt and cracked, points. He smiles. He explains, "I am an artist." Beneath the picture is part of an article about his genius, subtitled: "Jorge Monsterman Strikes Again"; the article was continued from another page, one he has chosen not to save or was unwilling to share. Possession of this personal paper would mean a beating or possibly death to any other inmate. The guard sees and grins the death's head; he too knows Monsterman's world fame.

We will not tell, not yet.

## After Two Years

Emily Van Kley

Black-rock beach of Lake Superior two summers ago, in August,  
boulders stacked against each other on the shoreline. We sat  
at the edge of one just before we rolled together into the water, naked.  
We'd hoped the lake would move gently around us and through  
the small gaps where our bodies curved back from each other  
and our skins did not touch, but instead our limbs seized up  
with cold and we surfaced spitting water, yelling. We pulled  
ourselves up at the closest rock, scraping wrists and thighs  
on its edges. I ran to where we'd left your bag, collected a blanket,  
a pack of cigarettes, matches. We sat shivering, shoulders pressed  
against each other under the blanket. You leaned your head  
toward me. I imagined you looking at the tight lines of goosebumps  
across my skin—light purple with cold. You turned away  
and the moment had frozen and shattered—you would not speak  
to me. You struggled back into your shorts, your t-shirt, your sandals,  
looking the whole time out over the water, while I smoked furiously.  
As I think of you now, I would like to light a cigarette and hold it  
at the end of this poem, let smoke curl under each word and escape  
through the spaces between to rub against you in the middle lines  
and up to the very beginning where you sit, lounging between  
verbs and adjectives, daring me to move you even one line down.

## What is holier than dust?

Kelley Jean White

Bread  
Maple seedlings  
The honey bee

Mold  
Lightning  
The eyeless grub

## Paper Nonnie

or The Forbidden Zone

Emily Van Kley

Her hair curling down over her ears,  
forehead scrunched, neck and back bent  
over the paper in front of her. Her polo  
shirt is soft, the shoulders worn almost  
to skin. Her hand is circling, circling  
and a curved line grows black on the page  
and then is through the page, ink soaking  
the cheap pine of the coffee shop table.  
Her papers are layered over each other,  
covering table surface and chair, spilling  
across her knees and onto the floor.

She is drawing her vagina with  
a permanent marker—a slash down  
the middle of the page, rounded  
and pushing against the white margins  
on either side. Her elbow bends,  
wrist jerks and she's made a clitoris.  
This is the closest she'll come to sex  
again, she tells me.

The thick lines of her drawing begin  
to bleed into each other, swirls and loops  
of the vulva melting into a warm black  
void. That's how it always ends up,  
she says: blurry and unsatisfying.

She looks up, grinning—says drawing  
isn't as messy as sex. I want to touch  
her shoulders where I can almost see  
them, pink through the blue shirt stretched  
thin. Or maybe I could push my fingers  
under the fabric and skim them across  
the skin covering her muscles, tensed  
as she works. I reach across the table  
but instead take a marker, ask her  
to teach me.

## Slouching

Emily Van Kley

I look at you pants ripped  
and pouring themselves over  
your shoes onto my doorstep  
your beard just starting  
a thin shadow laid against  
the angle of your jawbone  
long long hair  
I'd like to catch you off guard  
reach for your sleeve as  
you walk away  
avoid your eyes  
turn my face and  
with my hand pull hard  
against your neck  
push my lips against yours  
move both hands  
into your hair  
your tongue skittish  
mine sure

## looking for barnett newman in philadelphia

john sweet

driving through pale sunlight  
on the outskirts of  
someone else's city and  
what i feel is lost

the bleeding horse dragged for  
two hundred miles becomes  
nothing more than roadkill

the starving starve  
no matter where they are

they become angry or desperate  
like anyone else

they become numbers or  
the blinding white afternoon  
poured in through a hotel window

the simple truth is that  
this day will pass like all the rest

is that jonathon will  
wake up from his nap and  
want to play while the bodies of  
children half his age are  
pulled from the rubble of the  
latest war

and i refuse to feel guilty  
for the violence created by others  
no matter how many die

i refuse to be  
a footnote at 33

what i offer  
is my secondhand account of the  
burning house

my casual denial of god  
which is its own form of freedom

and what if i've remembered  
my life all wrong?

what if the things i've  
let go of  
are the things that mattered?

i always come back to  
the meaningless suicides of  
people i've admired

the paintings created by the  
hands of bitter men  
that seem to define my life

and what i miss is my home  
and when i get there  
what i'll crave is escape

what i'll think about are the  
anonymous prints hung  
above anonymous beds

my biggest mistake was  
standing still

the california book of the dead  
john sweet

families burned  
alive  
despite everything

this from a man  
three thousand miles away  
writing the california  
book of the dead

and in new york only rain

old blood streaking  
dirty windows

my entire life i've heard  
*write what you know*  
and this is it

the taste of the highway in  
gray twilight

the smell of gasoline  
smothering everything

and what these words  
resemble most is silence

an aftermath possibly  
or maybe the seconds before  
the bomb finds the  
sleeping village

or maybe just the sun  
after thirty years  
of frost

something pure and  
hopeful  
to hold onto when  
the bodies are finally  
pulled from the  
ashes

## a blessing john sweet

but we are out of myths  
here at the beginning  
of this frightened new century

we are waiting for the  
first body to wash ashore

are waiting for this woman  
consumed by flames  
to speak with the voice of god but  
it will not happen

by september  
the sun is nothing more  
than a shimmering white cradle  
for a forgotten sun

by october  
the tiny hands that pound  
on cathedral doors are  
reduced to impossibly small bones

and all my life  
i have been hearing about the  
starving children of the  
third world

i have been taught about  
the horrors of war while the  
next one was being planned in  
pale efficient rooms

the trick of course  
is to win  
or at least to live in a country  
other than the one being bombed  
and i have been lucky so far

## Witch's Path

(after "Heat" by Florine Stettheimer—  
Whitney Museum)

### Carol Frith

Each of these flat fields is old as a clock.  
Every spring, light falters and drains  
through the orange sand. Yellows unlock  
themselves, and a green sun fades and strains  
above the horizon. The lady in black takes stock  
of the light, nervous. The lady in black explains,  
explains. Four other women doze, the shock  
of neon colors like morphine in their veins —  
a lethargy of green and orange. A change  
is waiting by the willow. Boredom or wrath?  
Colors turn like omens, shifting and strange:  
dark table set for mass. The aftermath?  
Images that dreams will disarrange,  
five women sleeping down the witch's path.

my family is allowed  
to drink itself to death  
my friends to disappear or  
turn away from  
the person i've become

and the days turn cooler  
but not cold  
and in the evenings  
i read to my son

i watch his tiny hands  
trace the words as they fall  
from my lips

there is nothing  
i can give him that  
will not be devoured by  
the past

# Xerox Machine

## Ben Mitchell

When I saw you today by the Xerox machine, you  
looked radiant. The glow scanning across

your face. Sure, you shaded your eyes, but  
nonetheless, the light moved across, and I

could see your eyes, awake beneath your hand. Though you  
shaded your eyes, they smiled from the corners. I will

never tell, our little secret, my darling, May I  
call you darling, or would that be... What if,

rather, your magnificence? No? Perhaps  
I should be more conventional. Hello, my name is

Ben. Pleased to make your acquaintance. I was  
watching you from over by that dumpster, as you

hung out the "open" sign on the long metal hook. Anyway, I  
couldn't help but notice the trail you leave. How

the tulips seem to turn to follow you. What can I say, I  
think about you, carry you in my heart like

mental illness. Perhaps  
if circumstances were different, if

you were single, if I  
had more hair or lost thirty pounds, but still I

carry you like the plague. No, softer than that, and  
with fewer rats and corpses.

## Solitary

Daryl Rogers

I haven't written a poem now  
in I don't know when;  
but the weather sucks  
and free time is tenuous.  
I've got a wealth of notes  
though stuck in various pockets,  
and notes on notes  
in intricate disorder.  
I'll carry these around  
for another month or two  
adding and subtracting ideas  
as insubstantial as numbers  
taken out of context.  
I need feedback friends,  
feedback I tell you.  
Another rejection slip  
from the *New York Quarterly*  
ought to do the trick,  
or word from one of the contests  
I've paid to enter  
like a pathetic fool.  
My fellow jackoffs  
know that we write for our own;  
satisfaction or sanity.  
So, here's a snack  
to hold you till dinner.  
What's your problem?  
You're eating alone anyway.  
Bang on the pipes if you like it.

## Vietnam Redux

Daryl Rogers

He never talked about the war  
and I despised him  
so I never asked.  
Years later, both of us,  
too old to fight about it  
anymore, walked into his house.  
The History Channel was on.  
He'd been watching a show  
about steam locomotives.  
In its place was a film  
about the pilots that flew spotter planes  
into Cambodia and Laos like  
little single-engine bugs  
not even equipped with ejection seats  
whose purpose was to fly low  
and slow enough to see  
Vietcong in the dense jungle.  
Then, they would go into a dive  
and fire off smoke bombs  
to mark the target for the bombers,  
(and, if they were lucky,)  
pull up and get away.  
He started talking about  
being stationed near Da Nang  
with infantry, air force and navy.  
He said the worst part  
was our planes coming back  
all shot up, some crashing  
just shy of the runways,  
and he began to cry.  
We never spoke of it again.

## 16 January '84 Daryl Rogers

Somewhere in the city  
bone marrow is crystalizing;  
red slush that will be hard  
as an icicle by dawn.

When I turn the corner  
of my street, the flesh of my face  
growing numb and  
the sharp soreness sinking  
into my skull,  
I'm stunned by the sight  
of the unmarked snowscape:  
two inches of powder  
and a twinkling whirlwind  
rising beneath a streetlamp  
as the wind bites  
through my clothes.

"Look at the crazy bastard,"  
calls the voice of a friend of mine  
from about a half-block behind me.  
"Thinks he's a fucking mystic  
standing there freezing to death  
mesmerized by the damned snow."

The wind hides the rest  
of his monologue.  
I start up the hill  
toward my building  
and don't even look back.  
The onset of hypothermia  
and a voice from the grave  
are, in combination,  
a very bad sign.

## Chimps & Chumps Daryl Rogers

"Besides," he says to me,  
giving his wife a  
watch-this smirk,  
"if evolution is true  
how come there are  
still monkeys?"  
A short silence  
ensues during which  
he waits for me  
to concede the point.  
"Well," I reply,  
"the fact that monkeys  
still exist  
doesn't contradict  
the theory of evolution."  
Another heavy charged  
silence fills the house.  
"Chimpanzees and  
humans share 98%  
of their DNA and  
a common ancestor."  
This (of course)  
is like throwing water  
on a grease fire.

## A Place We Don't Go Now

Kathryn Kulpa

It is much too early in the morning and Tom, Flip, and the thirteen hopeless dangles eye each other cautiously. Tom is a man who knows well how to get what he wants but lately he is unsure that what he thinks he wants is actually what he needs. Flip is too hungry to care, and the thirteen, they can't think too well; if they could they'd be out planting tomatoes somewhere. They can only pump it in, and when they think about themselves, you'll find them at the bottom of a stairwell, empty and with a bottle of pills. Tom avoids Spanish Lorna, for she mouths his words too well. Flip runs from place to place but always comes up two cups behind at the all-night diner, and when he dares put down his headlines he is crushed or bemused. The thirteen carry everything they can get away with them and make sure everyone knows it. All of these people live in the place that is never as good as it used to be, where ghosts are too hard to find, where orange peels lie face up on the sidewalk and nobody is ever really happy.

Alliances are uncertain, fortunes undeclared. Every unturned table hides another coup but it doesn't matter: Isolda throws a party. One of the thirteen hands Tom a glass and he breaks it with no feeling but plenty of poise, so Flip, who smells like used tobacco, castigates him for being senselessly violent. One day Flip will pull a knife on a man who isn't really his father but it's all right, he doesn't know it yet and anyway will have changed his name by then. Tom, who knows Flip comes from a different era, laughs at him and lowers him out the window by a piece of thread. Flip sighs. He knows he will never catch the ring.

The next day they walk where the sidewalks crack open, and Flip stops to talk to a man with long black hair and a loincloth leading a Kashmir goat through the alley. The man says he is enlightened, but Tom pulls off his wig and explains to Flip that he really isn't. Flip fails to see the humor in all this, so Tom throws him away and makes him walk home. On the way Tom meets a man whose face looks just like his and he runs off, screaming at strangers. Tom steals a little kid's bike, tries to ride it, but the wheels fall off. He is so embarrassed that he digs a hole and when he comes out, everything has changed.

Spanish Lorna winks at him while stroking her pet husband soon to be discarded and says I told you so. By this time the thirteen hopeless dangles have all crawled home where the strongest one eats the rest and emerges pathetic yet powerful. Flip has kept his soul clean but sometimes he stares at his ceiling at night and cries. "Didn't we have a sense of self in those days!" someone says, and everyone who is not too drunk agrees.

When Tom falls, it is not one of the thirteen who catches him, and Spanish Lorna only sits with her lips tight. None of them have seen Flip in a long time. Tom would like to take something back, something he said when he thought words didn't matter. Now all he thinks about are words he said or didn't say, and suddenly everything matters, but it is too late. "Goodbye," he says, and only the wind answers.

## A Summer of White Cotton Sheets

Kathryn Kulpa

She's lying in the backyard, arms spread wide, sheets flying above her, tenting in the wind like the sails of ships sent to islands for spices and silk. The sun shining through them but not through them. Cotton has a grassy smell when wet, a smell different from rayon or wool. It smells of sun and hot days. The grass is pushing green into the corners of her body, her body that, lying down, touches the ground, the back of the head, shoulders, fingers spread out in a star, deep in the shaded green, and above, sailing white, the sheets on the clothesline. Twelve years old and she can feel herself growing. At night a sly something enters her bones and she can feel it pulling her, stretching to the ends of her toes.

In a certain summer, no longer twelve, she imagines a house filled with nothing but white cotton sheets. Draped from curtain rods, covering chairs, laid on the floor and pulled up against the walls so the house has no hard edges, no hot edges, only the coolness and draping of the sheets. Would the simplicity of this house, this calm, bring her back to that moment in the grass with the world of a washed white sheet stretching above as her only sky, in defiance of sun and change, gravity and energy? She takes a sheet from the laundry basket, folded stiff and dry, snaps it out of its folds, and lays it down. She lies on the sheet-softened floor, on its whiteness, her hands held warm against the bowl of her belly. She feels herself stretching, filling like sheets in the wind.

## Exile

(for Yannis Ritsos)

### B. Z. Niditch

Yesterday you slept  
against hot stone whiteness  
by the ocean's brooding waters  
under manic clouds  
near the empty beach fog  
hearing raucous waves  
entwined in anonymity.

It was your voice surging  
from a labyrinth of rocks  
incensed like Ulysses  
you hug the tallow candle's banks  
surrounded by a solitary salty sea  
deciphering every nameless exile  
with questions, riddles and secrets.

On the homesick harbor  
red birds with airless neutrality  
fly through the raucous sun  
you find no strangers welcome  
confronting a heavy grief  
yet you hold onto a gold compass  
of metaphor.

If only the wind will rise  
in a light ocean grey  
setting to sail  
you would swim away  
under the low fog  
holding onto only  
wine, olive oil and poems  
in the order of morning  
seeking to hide  
by the ships' shade  
on the ultramarine blue.

Your eyes angle  
toward the abdicating sky  
between a blood orange  
and the offshore wind  
your obstinate nature  
moves with earthly sweat  
an abandoned life  
leaping from silent death  
stopped by the sun.

## Boston Fall

### B. Z. Niditch

Feeling rootless  
you gather wood and logs  
watching a harvest of students  
taken to the Athens  
of America  
then you spin around  
on your maroon bicycle  
with an offhand modesty.

Discovering dangerous leaps  
you feel the recent rain,  
quoting Thoreau  
from the city folio landscape  
wondering if the repetitious cold  
will make you forget  
the yellow and red autumn  
breathing toward the day.

## The Road to Tyre

*spreads its loose ribbon along the shoreline,  
through orange groves hedged with white  
jasmine...*

Hedy Habra

“We’ll stop at Sidon,”  
you once said, “I’ll tell  
you the secrets of every stone,  
of every carving. We’ll bring  
back a blue vase  
of iridescent blown-glass,  
perhaps a small Narguileh.”

On the roadside, an old  
peasant, with white  
shirt and gathered black  
pants leads a donkey  
loaded with fruit baskets.

“I’d like to buy pomegranates  
to share when we return  
to Beirut,” I thought.  
“I’ll part the red leathered  
skin, roll the ruby seeds  
beneath my fingers  
one by one.”

I still feel the salty breeze,  
on my lips, the warm,  
dizzying scent of orange  
blossoms, a bridesmaid’s  
endless walk to the altar.

We never made it to Tyre,  
that day.  
We never saw the Crusaders’  
Castle together,  
we’ll never cross its paved  
causeway hand in hand,  
a narrow path, invisible  
from a distance,  
like a carpet thrown over  
the blue waters, linking  
its threshold to the shore,  
acquiring life only  
through familiar footsteps.  
Year after year  
we dreamt of going South  
again. The pomegranates  
untouched,  
forgotten on a shelf  
receding in my mind,  
must have shriveled  
like the fruits I pick  
with care, then throw  
out the window, deep  
into the woods.

## A Seaside Café, My First Taste of Fresh Oysters Hedy Habra

Was it Beirut or Alexandria?  
Under the shade, you put aside  
your Safari hat on an empty chair,  
squeezed lemon over the moist flesh.  
"Take all the juice," you said,  
holding the iridescent  
shell to my lips.

Yet one day you chased me  
around the house, menacing,  
a slipper in your raised hand.  
No one recalls what I had done.  
I was never caught.

I have placed letters  
into the wrong urns.  
First loves, impossible loves.  
I recall that time when  
I wished I were his wife  
until I saw him hold his child.  
I would have given my life  
to be his daughter.

## The Wheel Hedy Habra

It is a small apartment  
on a rooftop overlooking  
a Merry go Round,  
and a big lighted Wheel  
by the sea cornice,  
lined with palm trees.  
You check several closets  
filled with your children's  
clothes, soft woolens and cotton  
knits that never touched their skin,  
toys they never played  
with. You know,  
the ones you saved  
on the higher shelves,  
scented with lavender  
for when they're older.  
Someone lives there, an old  
Lebanese who signals more  
doors replete with boxes  
marked with your initials.  
He can't return any.  
Then, you realize these closets  
are hidden somewhere  
in the back of your mind.  
You're just too busy  
to open them.

## Second Sightings

Paul D. McGlynn

A day of ghosts; they're everywhere,  
Traffic a memory of cars and buses,  
Legends of strollers, bums and priests,  
Midnight wranglers. Pimps and whores,  
Shade of the simple kid, black wool cap.  
Statues of somber heroes in the park;  
Pigeons flutter like wandering souls.

That's where Little Caesar died:  
Mother of God. Why all this today?  
Where do they come from? Why?  
On the edge of town, the highwaymen,  
Apaches crouching in the woods;  
Honest farmer and his sturdy wife.  
You've been here, plowed those fields.

A child squalling, an old woman dies,  
Joan of Arc burns in the city square.  
You were born in that place of pious stones  
On a day like this, today in fact;  
You died over there by those maples.  
Look: here comes Sonny to the toll booth;  
He's mad as hell, a dollar in his hand.

## A Poet's Mystery B. Z. Niditch

Sibylline October  
with its sunken leaves  
red and orange  
in the city folio landscape  
from nameless streets  
I'm caught trying to find you  
lost in my own mirage  
of an unformed sentence  
where childhood  
with autumn's refuge  
in measureless visions  
passes by  
the climbing vines  
of my own imagination.

Wishing  
to explore the foliage  
of our frayed metaphors  
your razor-thin path  
offers a human labyrinth glow  
from the blind earth  
trying to escape  
our parental storms  
yet cannot locate  
what tosses us  
on moving abandoned fields  
to take my breath away.

## Amherst, October 2001 B. Z. Niditch

In the motionless morning  
squeezed by poignant dreams  
not remembering the status  
of chasms, ghosts, shadows  
you suddenly realize  
from your cool and misty window  
that you need to venture out  
to visit Emily Dickinson.

You open the door  
newspapers are here  
repelled by an unfamiliar fog  
you want to feel the breeze  
but wonder if my foreign body  
is still in a nocturnal rest.

Remembering the grandfather clock  
would encompass the living room  
on an opaque Oriental scene  
spying a busload of children  
on a field trip  
by the columns of hills  
feeling a spiral  
of the thirsty sunshine.

## The Poet

B. Z. Niditch

The authorities  
vague as enemy starlight  
fear the poet  
they have wrapped themselves  
away from print  
taken in the locksmiths  
even by schoolyards  
guarding all your last words  
admit it, admit it  
they want you incognito  
inheriting their deaths  
wishing to take away  
your metrical existence  
but you carry your notebooks  
on broken sidewalks  
on torn blankets  
neither known or reborn  
feeling always as an echo  
in your own wilderness  
for even on dark stones  
you are discreetly dangerous.

## City Square

B. Z. Niditch

The statue extends  
her arms,  
in the middle  
of the square  
where flies  
dust off mortgages.

They make you  
a black suit  
of flame.

Moths rise  
from payments  
and the milk stays rancid  
like whispers  
of sister's death.

## Resin

Barry Ballard

I hear it come with a rush of resin out of the trauma of its  
lopping-off

—Stanley Kunitz, *The Knot*

That cross-grained knot of your deeper life  
keeps emerging from the resin and soup  
of galaxies, from the bonfire at the back  
of your tongue roaring like a lion in winter.  
You can build from that roar consuming light  
and oxygen, from that sinking root  
of voice that has wedged itself in the black  
rusted walls of well-pipe. You feel it stir

itself from the dark that has been eroding  
you. It hammers like "distinction," "respect,"  
and "sincerity" at the back of your eyes,  
begging you out of your halt and stagger,  
coaxing you from the collar and gallows,  
and into what matters before you die.

## To Find Out If the Knife Still Worked

Geri Rosenzweig

I have to go back to a house in Ireland  
where all of us worked our tricks to perfection  
amid the jokes and sly jabs we called wit.

In less than the minute it takes to remove my coat,  
the blade leaps back to form, a circus artist  
hungry for the nick and cut, the twist and turn.

Someone turns up the dial on our canned laughter.  
Kitchen chairs back themselves against the wall.  
My knife walks an old tight rope.

This is when my father, peace to his name,  
would slip into the living room, shake out the newspaper.

Eyes glittering like sequins, I perform with the best  
until dusk arrives in the smoky arena and I drag  
myself up to the bedroom of the past,  
salt of old times flowing down my cheeks.

## Psalm of the Knife

Gerri Rosenzweig

Since the hand is my shepherd  
I shall not want for sorrow.

The web of its bones, shadow  
of its hunger, keeps my days.

As evening adjusts its shawl  
it leads me through pearly

fields of onion, it flosses my teeth  
on the scales of the bluefish.

All the mornings of my life  
I shall praise the hand,

nothing is so steadfast as its grip.  
In the valley of the sink

I am cleansed under running water.  
After the kitchen door closes

like a well-made box ticked shut in the dark,  
I lie down in the drawer of night.

For the hand's sake I recite my psalm  
among the spoons trembling in each other's arms.

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Simon Perchik

Some paths and not others  
the way a mole sensing where the sun  
—in the dark  
cutting across an open field  
warmer, warmer  
and the house where I was born  
is standing in the middle

—to this day  
one foot over the other  
rebuilds the world  
the few shadows  
trying to find their way out  
not sure where the morning is  
—I'm walking room to room  
towards the oldest inch on Earth

and to this day all seas glow in it  
as if my foot would point down  
is again on fire  
washed from a long way off.

“Get Drunk  
and Stay Drunk”

Kathryn Kulpa

Get drunk and stay drunk, he said,  
To trick that tyrant time.  
Advice from Baudelaire—  
Though then I did not know  
(His secrets now laid bare)  
How many lines he stole.  
Stay drunk on wine or poetry—  
It was so long ago.  
I hear them, always, in his voice  
But now he does not know.

Pull Sweetness  
Off the Blade  
Geri Rosenzweig

Take the knife into your mouth.  
Butter mixed with peach jam coats the risk.  
Summer drifts silk as a scarf into your mind.  
No one's watching, the children are deep  
into the blue pines of their lives, though  
you might hear your mother's voice  
call from a window of yellow stars, or feel  
the warmth of your father's hand on your wrist.

Close your lips around the flat of the knife.  
Ignore the kettle's scream on its bed of flame.  
Pull sweetness off the blade, onto your tongue.

## He Who Hears His Master's Voice

Alys Culhane

The dog, in hearing his master's voice, glances around the attic, then locates the source of the noise, a giant flower on a box-like object.

"Come," the voice commands.

The dog, hackles raised, moves forward. This is not his master, who smells like Prince Albert Tobacco, gunpowder, and wet wool. This is a machine, one that smells like warm metal and cold hardwood.

"Sit."

The dog shifts his weight to his haunches.

"Good dog," the voice says.

The mastiff cocks his head.

"Fetch," the voice barks.

The dog retrieves his master's slippers, pipe, and newspaper, then, tail wagging, places them at the base of the box.

"Lie down."

The canine, lying with head on paws, thinks that if his master is in the box, that he won't be able to feed, walk, or let him in or out of the house.

The surrounding air becomes heavy with silence. The dog, feeling drowsy, falls into a deep sleep. In time, a fine coat of dust covers dog and box.

"Sometimes we create our own misery"  
—Bob Tobey

## R. Yurman

water dripping off the rain gutters runs  
down the driveway—its steady echo  
drains into his head, filling  
the cavity behind his eyes

not so much an ache as a steady  
build of pressure like compressed air  
forced into a narrow space

if only he could expand, rise  
through the roof, disappear  
then re-appear, a burst of color  
ballooning into the tumbled sky

## Carp Alys Culhane

His gills flutter back-and-forth like fingers being drummed on a drinking glass. His orange tail moves side-to-side like a ship's rudder.

The carp wants to seize the day but his torpor has been fueled by crackers, breadcrumbs, the occasional piece of popcorn that bypassers have tossed in his direction. He used to be a small fish in a big pond. Now he's a big fish in a small pond.

The adults, sitting by the pond's edge, sip sodas. Their child pokes at the carp with a sharp stick.

"Child, get away from that goldfish," the mother says.

"If," the father adds, "you don't back off I'll paddle your bottom."

"He isn't moving," the child declares.

The parents join their child at the pond's edge. All watch as the carp, in rolling belly up, merges with the shadow of his former self.

“A Mind  
of Winter”  
R. Yurman

how long has it been  
since he crawled from his cave  
seduced by the scent of spring

rocks and ice  
and nothing growing  
enough to make a heart explode

too late  
or is it  
to escape the cold

a bear should know better  
a bear should

Bath

*(for Clive)*

R. Yurman

he doesn't want to get in  
wants to keep the flakes of black  
at the back of each ankle  
and the crusts between his toes  
stuff he can rub off in bed

besides no matter how hot the water  
the pink porcelain stays cold  
upright in the middle of the tub  
so his back won't touch  
he sits surrounded

by all the boats  
he owns the floating soap  
the painted wooden blocks  
faded light that spell his name  
the steam on the mirror

begins to thin the water  
cools to a soft brown scum  
fingertips wrinkle white  
a shiver passes through him  
he won't get out

## Kidney, Heart, and Hands Walt McDonald

It starts as cramps,  
an urgent need to go.  
Ease down on the seat  
and squeeze, feet digging the floor  
like stirrups. A drop or two,  
fire from sternum to groins.

She knows the signs  
what doctors called *honeymoon  
hangover*, decades ago. Tonight,  
antibiotics released a flow  
to float Noah's boat—  
relief not easily come by

for centuries of women, brides  
hiding themselves in pain  
behind curtains, shivering  
in winter toilets forty feet  
from husbands wondering what to do.  
Joseph, for instance, more signs

she'd been with a man. Recently.  
He took her in. Maybe heated oils  
and hyssop, anointing her hips  
and shoulders while she groaned.  
She sniffed the bitter wine  
and mint and took his hand,

palm hardened by hammers.  
She rubbed the stiff, tough  
calluses across her brow.  
She believed all pain would pass,  
that a little child would guide them,  
that whatever happened would be enough.

## When the Children Have Gone Walt McDonald

More snow today, deep into May,  
the natives pale, their children mean  
with cabin fever. Elk and mule deer graze  
downtown where weeds and lawns are green.

We've come to get away from dust  
and sunsets on the plains, years  
after our last child left. At dusk,  
we watch herds grazing their way uphill.

In the cabin after a moonlight sleigh ride,  
spring snow melting to mud and rocks,  
we lean back with coffee by the fire,  
rocking, watching another log.

## from Unceasing Labors Errol Miller

Poetry of Place,  
the horses stamp impatient

Cool water has been drawn, & Papa is gone

"There's some trouble out at Crossroads, take  
the gray mare"

when the time has come...

Connected to the plow connected to the buzzard-beast  
of change these are the twin instruments  
at the foot of the throne

Destiny? Predetermination? Struggle?  
The unknown dead, the unknown living, the unknown soldier  
in full flower whose hand tomorrow?

We know not why  
in the Tidewater Regions, we  
do not understand, but it is likely,  
before supertime, that we shall sacrifice  
more of ourselves, forsake our artistic worth,  
propelled onward towards the Upcountry  
where the bloodless ideal  
of the Old South  
is waiting.

## for The Southside Errol Miller

"Thy grief, thy joy, thy hate, thy love..."  
—Poe

Benign long journey,  
little peroxide-blond snowballs  
headed for the Tabernacle on Smith Street to  
see ol' Jordan roll, such comforting chains

O  
Jessie  
whose blood swings low    to break the spell whose  
eyes have seen the Glory whose  
cowardice departed at  
Pickett's charge

One  
lone bulb  
hangs solitary illuminating  
the struggle for survival: the props, the props, the props

Such  
partisan soil, free flight, the beauty  
of oblivion in the woodlands There in  
the high-stations of duty where bent  
& rusty stars shine down upon  
the romantic fiction  
of Dixie.

## Chuck's Job

Michael Nowicki

Chuck tells no tales of who  
sprained both his wrists at the workshop.  
Even the orderlies wonder  
was it friendship or just a need to pull  
away from the counter help or the truck drivers  
who always give Chuck a ride down the parking lot  
and back again only to have him unload  
what was inside all along.

But Chuck's words make sense  
only to him. So watchers hover over him  
making sure he has no way out,  
to snooze or grab a snack,  
but Chuck will take his sprained wrists  
back home like unwritten signs  
he can handle his job.

## Stanley Kunitz

Barry Ballard

When you have tamed me, tell me, in the melancholy of the living  
how long will my shadow fly?  
- Stanley Kunitz *Meditations on Death*

Frailty wrapped with a soul, and you lift  
me with one hand, effortlessly, as if I  
weighed nothing. I am already in the sky  
when death pursues you. I am already fixed  
in the wounded clouds or the gleaming sword  
of Orion's constellation when you cast  
your weakened shadow with Bonhoeffer's last  
prayer in his cell. I wonder what you've stored

at the back of your heart from remembering  
how hatred was once ordered into law.  
You cast a long shadow, the brighter rose  
of our reflections, always offering  
a foothold from your slumber with the scrub pines,  
then guiding us to where we need to go.

## from Judgement Day Errol Miller

A short  
summer, hot as hell, weeds  
grew in the living room you remember  
the climate the kinfolks you fell back on

Plain truth  
swept over the land a harvest

the Green Mountains were clogged with pickups  
heading further South (to no avail)

the faces on Stone Mountain smiled  
& historians who had never seen Rock City  
began celestial investigations

All  
was lost save memory: streets/yards/  
the good fight/Blue or Gray/last night  
fiction/nagging irregularities/

emancipation?

# Poem

Based on an Actual Photograph (2): Untitled  
Puppies in Fish Tanks by Roger Ballan

Alan Catlin

On the black backdrop modern man  
cave paintings: the head of a glam  
stoner drawn in white ink, a kind of  
feral animal head—not exactly dog,  
not exactly werewolf but something  
in between, sketched near partial pieces:  
scribbled heads, extraterrestrial space  
vehicles, Haydn's skull returning—blank  
spacing for a growth by semester's end  
palimpsest of indecipherable images  
runeing for the ages, something for the head  
of a spaced strange man, chin leaning against  
a rough wooden table, glazed eyes trying  
to take in, to encompass this kinetic  
sculpture consisting of—on their sides—  
transparent fish tanks stacked as cubes,  
playpens or resting places for white puppies  
sniffing the outer limits of their open air  
chambers or resting as if anesthetized,  
euthanized?; Art in action or something  
more sinister, perhaps, mad science in progress.

## Man

Bent over Wristwatch of Dead Boss

Alan Catlin

kneeling on concrete sidewalk,  
Rolex removed from limp wrist  
stained by blood spatters, smears  
on gray summer suit coat sleeve,  
white, embroidered with initials  
shirt clearly visible though the man's  
head is not, is hidden by special pages  
of a *Wall Street Journal*, his employee  
considering the removed object as a  
talisman, a trinket, a spoil of some  
undeclared war fought just this side  
of the grave.

## Chuck's Bedtime

Michael Nowicki

Nine o'clock comes from my brother  
as my father gives him a shower before bed  
but even in bed Chuck won't lie down  
he sits up and smiles  
letting the hours pass without care  
which makes me think he does not know  
our father's voice booms down the hall  
for all lights to go out  
so I stroke my brother's back  
and encourage him to lie down  
then I turn off the light as my father wishes  
but Chuch sits up, turns the light back on,  
and smiles  
as if he accepts that no one will know  
or care  
where he made his nightly  
civil rights stand.

## Excavation

Daryl Rogers

We uprooted  
an insane asylum  
in a poor part  
of old downtown  
and made way  
for something  
clean and new.

There were  
corroded  
iron rings  
with lengths  
of rusted  
chain attached  
embedded in  
the limestone  
block of the  
basement walls.

When we ran  
across these  
artifacts  
we gathered  
and paused  
and talked  
about old times.

Then we ripped  
it all out  
and went on  
about our  
business.

# No Rest in Supple Verse

after Yi Huan (1840–1891)

Vera Schwarcz

Here, fallen leaves crowd the boat,  
wind streaming.

Wine in hand, swallow the end of a song,  
brush the eastern shore.

Bamboo shadows wave lustrous,  
a sea of singular jade.

The maple forest in riotous color,  
a vat of red.

There, ululation of autumn's gloom is endless.  
Ravaged pavilion and terrace, more wretched still.

Though linked in soul,  
cut off by gaping space.

When time so coarse and heavy,  
no rest in supple verse.

## After Levis, Fall, 2000, Santa Cruz Vincent Cioffi

My wife has a friend who  
has been dying thirty years. He can't  
move except to breathe. He is  
always in pain. For thirty years he

has wept each time the woman who loves him  
wipes the shit that  
runs down his legs. I love my wife so much I  
leave her to remind myself. I tell her,

Vermont is the whitest state in the nation and I can't  
stand that. I go to Brooklyn where  
Russian waitresses ignore you if  
you speak English. I stare at the East River.

I talk to friends I no longer have and  
I smoke. I've carried one book  
twenty-eight thousand miles in a bag with some clothes,  
a picture of my father, a picture of my sons because  
in it a poet said, *though I don't know much about madness,  
I know it lives*. I repeat this to anyone who walks between me  
and the river, the Russian who brings me sliced meat  
pinned between two beets or the residents

of the Ovington Avenue group home  
whose parents love them.

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